

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

“Plan B”: Every Little Bit Helps

“For Customer Service 24 Hours A Day, Call 1-800-###-####.”

You’ve seen it prominently displayed on most of the bills you receive, either at home or at work. A toll-free customer service line. Call us if there’s a problem, they say. We’ll take care of it for you.

One night, as I was going through the mail at home, I discovered a problem on one of our bills. I saw the company’s customer service number on the bill, and I decided to dial it up.

And that night, a revelation came to me that I’d like to share with you. This can work for either business or personal billing issues.

The number one goal of a call center is customer retention. Statistics show that it’s 7 times more expensive to win a new customer than it is to retain the customers you have. Most companies have realized this, and have equipped their customer service people to save customers however they can.

If you’re calling to cancel your service, there are several pre-written scripts they’ve rehearsed to help you realize the value of your ongoing relationship with the company, and to keep you on board.

If the scripts don’t work, and the customer still wants to cancel their account, there’s Plan B.

And that night I discovered how to ask for – and receive – the benefits of Plan B.

Many companies have given their customer service reps pre-authorized “things” that they can give to customers if they feel they may lose their business. Freebies. Discounts. Credits to their account. If they’ve gone through the “value script” (Plan A), they can move on to Plan B.

The young lady I talked to that night listened to my problem. I was nice about it, and it was obviously an error on their part. She went through her value script, hoping to keep me as a customer even though they had made the error.

When that was done, here’s the “magic question” I asked the young lady that night:

“What sorts of things are you allowed to give me in order to keep me as a customer tonight?”

I was not rude, mean-spirited, or nasty about it. I merely wanted to know if there was anything that she was holding back that I could receive for my trouble.

She paused a moment. “Well, Mr. Guertin, I can give you a \$20 credit on your next statement. Would that be OK?”

OK?? To me, that was great! “Sure, please put that credit on my statement.”

Of course, not every company will have this kind of leeway. Some may say that there's nothing they can do or give to you for your trouble. But unless you ask, you'll never know.

I don't like to call companies to fix problems. But it's nice to know that some of them have put things in place to reward good customers for staying with them.

All you have to do is ask. Nicely.

And in business as well as our personal lives, every little bit helps.

Bill Guertin, Chief Enthusiasm Officer of The 800-Pound Gorilla, works with companies of all sizes to improve their sales, marketing, service skills, and profitability.